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Sen. Boren To Seek Vote On Gates Soon

Action Could Doom CIA Nomination

By Walter Pincus and Bob Woodward
Washington Post Staff Writers

The nomination of Robert M. Gates as director of the Central Intelligence Agency ran into serious new difficulties yesterday. The chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Sen. David L. Boren (D-Okla.), announced that he will ask the panel to act soon on the nomination, which Senate sources said could doom Gates' chances of confirmation. A committee Republican, Sen. Arlen Specter (Pa.), urged President Reagan to consider withdrawing Gates' nomination.

Boren said he will ask the committee to either vote up or down on Gates or urge Reagan to withdraw his name, although other senators have suggested that Gates remain as acting director while inquiries by congressional committees and a special counsel continue into the Iran-contra affair. Boren said that leaving Gates as "interim acting director for a prolonged period of time" would not be "good for national-security interests."

Concerns about confirming Gates have grown in the Senate since his two-day appearance before the Senate intelligence panel this month. Tuesday several Republican and Democratic senators called for a delay in voting on Gates until the Senate has a clearer picture of the role he played in controversial events related to the Iran-contra affair. Gates, who served as deputy to CIA Director William J. Casey during most of last year, participated in activities and was present at meetings during last October and November that are being scrutinized by independent prosecutor Lawrence E. Walsh and special House and Senate select committees.

Specter suggested to reporters yesterday that Gates' behavior should be seen in the context of "a whole pattern . . . of calculated concealment." Yesterday, Specter said the acting CIA director still has many questions to answer about events just before and after the diversion of Iran arms funds to aid the Nicaraguan contras became public last Nov. 25.

Specter's request to Reagan that he consider withdrawing the Gates nomination was contained in a letter the senator sent to the president on Tuesday, according to an informed source.

Boren, according to an aide, is aware that a vote soon on Gates' nomination could easily be negative, because so many senators have reservations about his role in the Iran-contra affair. But the aide said the chairman is ready to allow committee members all the time they want to question Gates about his activities to try to resolve their doubts.

When Gates was nominated, Boren said "most committee members had a positive feeling" toward him and that he did not see any reason at that time why he would not be confirmed. He also said he thought only one day of public hearings would be necessary.

In a statement yesterday, Boren and the panel's vice chairman, Sen. William S. Cohen (R-Maine), said they will "make a determination on how to proceed with the nomination" after a closed hearing with Gates next Wednesday.

Specter said yesterday he was studying a report by the CIA inspector general into the Iran-contra affair that "raises questions about his [Gates'] competency."

Many questions have been directed at Gates' reaction to the early indications he received that funds from arms sales to Iran might have been diverted to support the contras fighting the government of Nicaragua. First word of this possibility came to Gates on Oct. 1, almost two months before that fact became public. Gates said he gave the information to his superiors and then to the White House.

He said he did not act more forcefully or bring it to the attention of Congress because his evidence was "flimsy."

Independent counsel Walsh is concentrating on October and November, particularly on the days leading up to Casey's testimony before the House and Senate intelligence panels on Nov. 21. Gates, according to his own testimony, had responsibility for the "strategic direction" of the preparation of Casey's testimony.

A draft of Casey's statement was changed shortly before he was to deliver it. The change was made after Secretary of State George P. Shultz said it contained misleading information.

In addition, some Senate intelligence panel members have asked the CIA and the White House for information on Gates' role in the development of plans for U.S.-Egyptian joint military actions against Libya in 1985. The Washington Post reported that Gates was the author of a paper that said such an action could "redraw the map of North Africa."

In a related matter, the House and Senate select committees investigating the Iran-contra affair are scheduled to meet this afternoon to approve immunity from prosecution for three people in return for their testimony.

Fawn Hall, former secretary to National Security Council aide Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, Jr., is one of the three, sources said. Hall has been given immunity by Walsh.

One of the other individuals reportedly is Robert C. Dutton, a retired Air Force colonel who worked for a firm run by retired Air Force major general Richard V. Secord, sources said. Dutton took part in the shipment of the final 500 TOW antitank missiles from Israel to Iran last Oct. 30. That shipment was associated with the release two days later of David Jacobsen, a hostage held in Lebanon by pro-Iranian extremists. Dutton was also involved in a network that provided arms to the contras, according to participants in that network.

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Chairman Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.) said his House panel will not consider at this time granting immunity to North or former national security adviser Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter.

"We really do not understand at this point the facts relating to Mr. Poindexter or Mr. North. And until we do understand those facts or we have information on it, we don't think we should grant immunity to those gentlemen," Hamilton said.

Staff writer Edward T. Walsh contributed to this report.

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